DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 443 808 SP 039 365

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TITLE	Closing Emotional Distance: An Analysis of Parent-Teacher Interactions in Secondary Schools.
PUB DATE	2000-04-24
NOTE	32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Foreign Countries; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; *Parents; Secondary Education; *Secondary School Teachers; Social Influences
IDENTIFIERS	Emotions; Ontario

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways in which the culture and organization of teaching influences the experiences and emotions secondary teachers report in their interactions with parents. Hargreaves' (1998) framework, based on the emotional politics of teaching, is modified and applied to the analysis of 68 secondary teacher interview responses from 2 studies that took place in 1997 and 1999 in Ontario, Canada. Four themes that emerged in the data were examined: (1) the prevalence of interaction rather than relationship between secondary teachers and parents; (2) teachers' sense of moral purpose and notions of caring that influence how they interact with parents and interpret these interactions; (3) mutual surveillance between parents and teachers; and (4) notions of teacher professionalism as they shape teacher-parent interactions. Findings indicate that parent-teacher contracts are typically episodic, school-based, and rule-bound. The paper closes with questions and suggestions for further research. (Contains 94 references.) (Author/SM)

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ED 443 808

Closing emotional distance:
An analysis of parent-teacher interactions in secondary schools

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10TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL ROUNDTABLE ON SCHOOL, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, April 24, 2000
New Orleans

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Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which the culture and organization of teaching influences the experiences and emotions secondary teachers report in their interactions with parents. Hargreaves' (1998) framework, based on the emotional politics of teaching is modified and applied to the analysis of sixty-eight secondary teacher interview responses from two studies that took place in 1997 and 1999 in Ontario, Canada. Four themes emerged in the data and were examined: (1) the prevalence of interaction rather than relationship between secondary teachers and parents; (2) teachers' sense of moral purpose and notions of caring that influence how they interact with parents and interpret these interactions; (3) mutual 'surveillance' between parents and teachers; and (4) notions of teacher professionalism as they shape teacher-parent interactions.

Findings indicate that parent-teacher contacts are typically episodic, school-based, and rule-bound (Bernhard & Freire, 1999; Walker & MacLure, 1999). The paper closes with questions and suggestions for further research.

Introduction

Interaction between parents and teachers is one of the most common forms of social interchange for those who have children or teach them. Those of us who have been teachers or parents with school aged children know that these interactions can be emotionally laden. We often experience fear, anxiety or unease in anticipation of the exchange and relief when it goes smoothly. We try to look and sound our best and to show that we are caring, concerned and responsible, because we know we will be judged. The emotional dynamics of parent-teacher interactions are complex and puzzling.

Social interactions that draw individuals together are grounded in emotionality (Denzin, 1984, p. 133). Emotions are not solely internal, personal phenomena. They are also social in nature. They exist between people as much as within them. Emotions are an important form of communication between individuals. They are also a referent point for self-understanding. They help us discern when we feel safe, threatened, satisfied, or frustrated. Exploring emotions that are elicited during interactions between individuals, can provide a window to help us understand subtle, often unspoken, elements in human interaction.

Emotions are central to human interchange, whether in the form of relationships that are enduring in nature, as with loved ones, or those that are fleeting, such as the glance of a stranger that warms our heart, or makes us cringe. Emotions are integral to social meaning, support, security and recognition (or the absence of these) in our relations with others. Emotions and emotionality are also embedded in relations of power and status, with positive emotions being associated with gains in power or status and negative emotions occurring from the opposite (Kemper, 1993). Emotions are much more than a set of technical or transferable 'intellegences' (Goleman, 1995). They are deeply embedded in psychological and biological phenomena that are inextricably interconnected with relationships and sense of purpose and power. Moreover, notions of power and status are inseparable from an individual's moral purposes, which are developed through the cultures or communities into which people are socialized (Lasky, 1999). All these interconnected elements - purpose, power and relationship - come into play in parent-teacher interactions (Hargreaves, 1998).

Our notions of school and appropriate relationships of emotional closeness or distance between parents and teachers are shaped by deep-seated, enduring social, political and institutional beliefs and practices. These include: our own experiences of

school (Hargreaves, in press); images of schooling popularized in the media, (Dehli, 1995); policies that redefine parents' roles in the schooling of their children (Whitty, Power, Halpin, 1998; Crozier, 1998); notions of teacher professionalism that are built primarily on the idea of 'teacher-as-expert' (Epstein, 1995); and the impact of cultural beliefs, socioeconomic status or immigrant status on parents' engagements in schools (Bourdieu, 1977; Ogbu, 1993). Many of these influences have created symbolic and actual separation between parents and teachers.

The school improvement and school effectiveness movements helped redefine how parents could be involved in their children's schooling and how their interactions with teachers could be improved (Comer, 1996; Slavin et al, 1994; Sanders & Epstein, 1998). Important innovations in these areas include: developing parent-school partnerships (Epstein, 1995); creating a closer match between school and community 'cultures' by bringing parents into the school and involving them in an array of activities (Delpit, 1995; Harrison, 1993) or utilizing parents' funds of knowledge to develop culturally sensitive curricula (Lipka, 1991; Moll & Greenberg, 1990); encouraging parents to be activists (Dehli & Januario, 1994) and fostering parent participation in school governance, as in school councils (Leithwood, 1998). Most of this work however has been conducted in elementary school settings, not secondary.

In recent years, there has been an increase in empirical studies that focus specifically on parent-teacher interaction. Work in this area has examined communication between Latino descent parents and elementary teachers during parent-teacher conferences (Bernhard, 1999); interactional dynamics during formal school events such as parents' nights, and parent-teacher conferences in secondary schools (Bastiani, 1988; Clark & Power, 1998). This work also analyzed teachers' perceptions of parents from different socioeconomic classes (Crozier, 1997) and examined how 'cultural capital' impacts parents' abilities to understand and integrate teachers' recommendations for participation in children's learning into family life (Lareau, 1987; Lareau, 1989). Virtually all of these studies have focused on interaction in elementary settings.

Although comparatively little empirical work has been done at the secondary level, what evidence we do have suggests that teacher-parent engagement gradually diminishes from children's early years through adolescence (Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1996). This seems to be due in part to parents' changing perceptions of their role and expectations of teachers. Teachers tend to expect that parents will be less involved in student learning and school activities than do their elementary counterparts

(McGrath, 1997). Saunders, Epstein, Connors-Tadros (1999) found that few secondary parents report being involved in school activities such as volunteering, fund raising, or committee participation. High percentages of these same parents also reported that their child's school had never contacted them about activities. Parents also reported school initiated contact, encouragement and specific suggestions on how to help their adolescent makes them feel welcome, valued and important in the teaching and learning process.

Walker & MacLure (1999) examined the intricacies of conversation and turn-taking between secondary teachers and parents during student conferences. They discovered that the discourse was bound by silent rules, which they likened it to formal talk between doctors and patients. In student conferences, teachers were in control - choosing the topic of discussion, dominating the interaction, and talking about students from their perspective. Interestingly, parents exhibited some controlling mechanisms of their own in relation to their power to judge teacher competence based on personal knowledge of their children and teachers' moral practices such as displays of caring for their child (Maclure & Walker, 2000). Each of their studies identifies barriers embedded in conversation that involve manipulations of power that can impede teacher-parent communication and understanding.

Research that focuses explicitly on the emotional dynamics of teacher-parent interactions at the secondary level is even less prevalent (Hargreaves, 1998, Hargreaves, 1999; in press). This study investigates this important area of interaction by examining how power, culture and sense of purpose affect the emotions secondary teachers report experiencing as a result of their interactions with parents. It suggests that the culture and organization of teaching influence the values, discourses and senses of purpose secondary teachers hold and thus the experiences and emotions they report in their interactions with parents.

Conceptual Framework

Although partly biological in nature, emotion is also a social construction (Dewey, 1922; Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990; White, 1993). Repertoires of emotions are like languages. Although there is a common basis for language in all people, each culture has its own vocabulary, syntactic forms and meanings. Likewise, each culture and occupation has patterns of emotions and emotional display that are somewhat distinctive, that derive from societal practices, and that convey meanings and

effects to members of that culture (Oatley, 1993). In short, emotion is embedded in socially established structures of meaning (White, 1993).

Emotion is both a medium and a message of socialization. Individuals in all cultures appropriate guidelines or display rules according to cultural and ideological standards (Heise and O'Brien, 1993p. 493) for where, when and how to express particular emotions with different people. For instance, professions such as nursing, teaching and flight attendancy emphasize the importance of caring while remaining in control professionally. (Chambliss, 1996; Hochschild, 1985; Nias, 1999). Elementary school teachers are often expected to be firm, yet caring with children. At the same time they are expected to be emotionally detached, in control, or calm when interacting with parents (Waller, 1932, Grumet, 1988).

Socialization into a culture or an occupation is embedded in human interactions that occur in an array of group or cultural contexts. Because individuals tend to hold membership in many different groups, there is no singular socializing influence. Each membership provides identity, motives, goals, roles and interaction partners. (Kemper, 1993, p. 41). While engaging in interaction, we learn how to interpret and express emotions through direct instruction, contingency learning, imitation, identification with role models and communication of expectations. Individual and collective emotions, thereby, obtain cultural meaning because of their role in culturally available "scripts" for communicating and interacting. As such, emotions comprise one kind of interpretive scheme (script-like or story-like) which gives shape and meaning to the human experience and the social self (Shweder, R, 1993, p. 425).

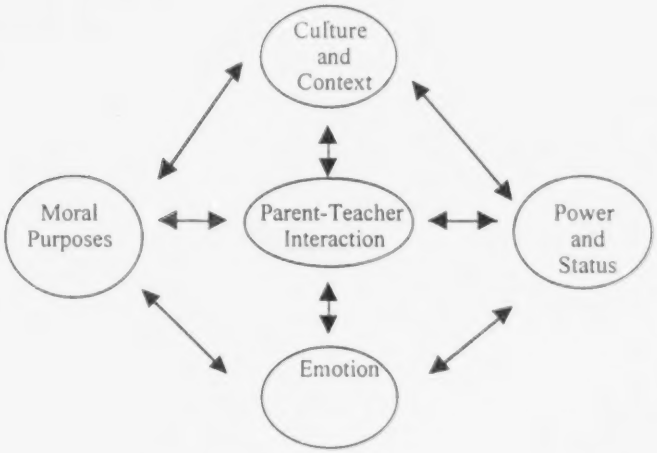
Emotional intersubjectivity involves the ability to hold shared meanings that are developed over time, through sustained interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), among two or more persons within a common field of experience (Denzin, 1984). Emotional intersubjectivity presupposes shared histories, knowledge and taken-for-granted assumptions about the world (Denzin, 1984) in order for common meanings to develop. From this perspective, collective meanings must first be present before people can move to deeper levels of shared emotional experiences.

Emotional understanding is an intersubjective process requiring one person to enter into the experiential field of another and experience for him or herself the same or similar emotions felt by another (Denzin, 1984, p 137). Emotional intersubjectivity, as the starting point, is how shared understanding of particular emotional expressions and the meanings they hold occurs. Emotional understanding is deeper. It requires a shared understanding where one person actually feels what

another person is experiencing. Empathy is a closely related concept. Teacher-parent relationships that are robust and multifaceted require commitments and conditions that allow emotional understanding to develop between individuals. Yet, a great deal of the history, culture and organization of teaching makes achieving such understanding difficult or impossible.

This research examines how the cultural and social organization of teaching shape experience and influence emotions that secondary teachers report in their interactions with parents. Hargreaves' (1998) framework, based on the emotional politics of teaching, is used here to analyze secondary teachers' interview responses in which they described interactions with parents that elicited negative and positive emotions. Parent-teacher interactions are explored as emotional practices, that are inseparable from teachers' moral purposes, shaped by influences of culture and relationship, and are inextricably interconnected with elements of status and power. As the **Figure 1** below indicates, each of these elements impacts the other. Teacher-parent interaction, at the center, is the focus of our analysis. The bi-directional arrows indicate that these outer elements shape and frame parent-teacher interaction, yet changes in interaction patterns can also reshape notions of culture, power and moral purpose. These are the interconnected, inseparable elements of human interaction.

Fig. 1 A Cross-correlational model for emotional influences on parent-teacher interactions.



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Methodology

Data upon which this paper is based were drawn from two studies that took place in different times (1997 and 1999), different secondary schools, different districts, and different policy contexts in Ontario, Canada. Sixty-eight secondary teachers were interviewed across the two studies. Schools in the two studies (N=19) represent different cultural and racial demographies and well as a mixture of rural, urban and suburban localities. Teacher samples were representative of age, gender, ethno-cultural background, subject specialty, and teaching experience.

Interview protocols in both studies addressed teachers' conceptions of parents' roles in the educational process, types of interactions with parents, and the emotional dimensions of those relationships, in either positive or negative directions. Responses were analyzed inductively. Data concerning teacher-parent relationships, were extracted electronically, and analyzed inductively. They were coded and grouped according to themes, ensuring that all data were accounted for and included in the framework. While one-time interviews do have limitations, we found teachers remarkably reflective and open about their relationships with parents.

Cultural and Emotional Politics

As is the case with any social institution, schools develop and reproduce their own specific culture and sense of community - traditions, customs, routines, and rituals, which condition work life. Schools also reinforce the validity of values, beliefs and expectations linked to the social life of the groups which constitute the school as an institution (Perez-Gomez, 1997; Lareau, 1989). In these ways, teachers form a culture defined by their socialization into and identification with a profession. Aspects of this include their formal education, continued professional development and beliefs and practices particular to the schools in which they teach. As in other occupations, teaching whittles its followers down to convenient size and seasons them to suit the occupation's taste (Waller, 1932). Teaching makes the teacher.

Beliefs, practices, and routines (the day-to-day ways of doing things) comprise the essence of culture. Yet, culture is more than a result of interactions and relationships per se. For institutions such as schools, the interactions and other elements that comprise culture are also embedded in relations of status and power - in the authority relationships of the classroom (Waller, 1932); between principals and teachers (Grumet, 1988); in the micropolitics of teachers' careers (Blase and Anderson, 1995), in patterns of 'surveillance' between parents and teachers (Crozier,

1998); in the home knowledge, sanctioned by the school, that connect children and their family cultures, or disconnect them from the official curriculum (Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1998); and in the ideologies of professional status and identity that teachers can use to distance themselves from parents (Hargreaves, in press). In short, culture and power are inseparable components of school life. Emotions and power, we have proposed, are similarly intertwined. Gains and losses in power and status act as strong sources of positive and negative emotion. For these reasons, we have focused our analysis on the cultural and emotional politics of teacher-parent interactions. We examine two aspects of cultural and emotional politics in detail - relationships and power.

Relationships

Public schools in North America have traditionally offered limited opportunities for teachers and parents to interact. This is especially true at the secondary level. What interactions there are, tend to be largely school-based, e.g. volunteering, fundraising, or attending school events. Traditional or "classical" notions of professionalism (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996) have stressed that teachers should remain emotionally distant or 'objective' while interacting with youth and their parents. Since the late 1980s, the rhetoric of home-school partnership has become a key component of school effectiveness and school improvement research and advocacy (Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997). Partnership, however, is an amorphous term that does not always make explicit the unresolved terrain or the precise nature of teacher-parent relationships. It has been much more comprehensively explored at the primary level of school.

One of the real tensions that many teachers experience is their sense that personal relationships with, and moral obligations to children and their parents are constantly overridden by an official spirit of contractualism (Nias, 1999). The paradox is that teachers are expected to remain professionally distant, while also displaying emotional involvement through caring (Grumet, 1988). This paradox is also an element in other heavily 'feminized' professions, such as nursing (Chambliss, 1996).

Our data indicate that secondary teachers and parents still tend to have relatively limited contact that is almost solely school-based:

> I haven't had a lot of recent contact with parents because I wasn't able to go to the last Parent Night...It's been a while since I have had a formal interview with a parent. I have talked a couple of times on the phone but not to any great extent.

> ...Maybe it's the nature of the courses that I teach (Accounting), but I don't have much contact with parents...I don't see many parents, for Parents' Night. They don't come in. And the ones that I've phoned...you have a certain amount of influence...often the parents I'm talking to are because the kid is having trouble in school...I'm not always sure how great (my influence) is.

Communication was typically "one-way" with "teachers phoning home". "If I don't initiate it", one teacher said, "I don't often hear from parents." Although "parents are very supportive when necessary...I don't see the parent involvement that I would like to see or that other teachers would like to see." At "Meet the Teachers" night, this teacher recalled, only one parent of her 90 students turned up. Many parents generally seemed to teachers to be not very interested in school affairs. "I don't see that many parents", said one teacher — "I wish they would be more interested in... this project." "I don't see the parent involvement coming out of the bushes and swamping us", said another "I don't see many parents, for Parent's Night", said third — "they don't come in".

Opportunities for secondary teachers to develop relationships with parents were very rare in our data. Only two teachers explicitly discussed having more sustained communication with parents. These took place at the school or because of sport events:

> ...In terms of the parents, our job is to communicate with our community and so we welcome phone calls. They can come in. There's a number of parents that come in for various reasons. One parent this year, her dad died. She had a dental office, so she donated a number of used computers. The reason she did that is her kids are going here. This is one opportunity for her to chat with me and so on...What we often do (with our United Way) is we 'win' somebody to come with us---to maybe take a class. One year I won a trustee. So, she spent the day with me and it gave her an opportunity to see what's going on. I think we have a variety of mechanisms like that throughout. How many there are? That really depends on the teacher...

> ...I know a lot of parents from sports, because I'm always at games, and they are too. In fact, I had five Mums over to my house last week for wine and cheese. It was supposed to be 4:30-6:30, but it lasted until about 10:30. So, you know, it was really fun...They found out a lot of stuff about their kids that night...all those people that I had over had been on overnight trips with me either cheerleading or rugby. We went down to Ohio with the rugby team, and up to North Bay with the cheerleading team.

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All interactions between most teachers and parents occurred during formal school events or through pathways of correspondence sanctioned by the school - parent nights, parent-teacher interviews, conferences and calls to students' homes, e.g., discipline problems, lack of attendance, or problems of low academic achievement:

> ...There are formalised meetings, but there's opportunity... in other ways, you get to know each other a bit. They come to certain events, either Parents' Night, or the school play, or recitals. You get to know them more, and even though you don't deal with their children necessarily...they're out to help the school.

> I...phone parents if their kid's marks were going down. I've only had 2 parents who yelled at me for phoning, like, it was none of my business...That was surprising to me, it wasn't a typical reaction from parents. But you get all kinds of parents.

Some distance between teachers and parents is created just by the nature of adolescent development:

> ...I'm involved with a lot of parents with extra-curricular staff, and happily so. They're very helpful and I've become friends with quite a few of them...Many kids don't like having parents around the school. They go to school to get away from their parents. So having parents around isn't positive in that sense to a number of them. And even kids who like their parents, it's like, "Gosh, we came to school to get away from our parents".

For the purposes of this analysis a distinction is made between interaction and relationship. Interaction is episodic, 'rule bound,' and formalistic communication (Walker & MacLure, 1999). 'Relationship' is a qualitatively different kind of communication that involves more sustained contact, equality, spontaneity, increased depth of shared meaning, values, goals and affinity. Rules of discourse and social norms still apply to relationship, so it is the parity, fluidity, the ability to exchange roles and depth of shared meaning that are the key differentiating features.

Shared understanding and meaning are developed through sustained contact in which individuals participate in conjoint (Dewey, 1938) or joint-productive (Vygotsky, 1962) activities. Doing things together, over time, creates the conditions for people to develop shared meaning, values and goals (Tharp & Gallimore; 1988; Cole, 1985; Rogoff, 1990). So, while it is true that parents and teachers do interact, it is rare that the conditions necessary for relationship to develop are present. When parents and teachers interact only sporadically, it is difficult to develop trust, mutual respect, shared meaning or purposes. The

conditions necessary for them to experience emotional understanding are absent (Denzin, 1984).

Formal interactions, located in the school or limited to school topics, allow parents and teachers to interact comfortably within their stereotypic, or projected images of 'the other'. As Willard Waller observed long ago:

> Much of social interaction rests upon stereotypes. The interactions of intimates largely escapes the influence of the stereotype, and so does naïve experience for which no model exists in one's social world. But a very wide range of social interchange in affected by the presence of more or less definite stereotypes, sometimes stereotypes which have currency in an entire social group...and sometimes constructs of our own relating to particular persons or classes of persons. This is possible because in many kinds of relations we do not correspond to another person directly, but always to a more or less veracious construct of him in our minds (Waller 1932, pp. 415).

Such stereotypes or one-dimensional representations of others were evident in our data. All teachers reported experiencing positive emotions, such as happiness and satisfaction in their interactions with parents, when they believed parents were being responsible, when they supported and recognized teachers' efforts or when they respected their professional judgment. Teachers consistently reported an increased willingness to work with parents when these conditions were present:

> Parents volunteer in the library every week. I think the relations are good...since I've been at this school. We have quite a strong parent volunteer group, and I've used the parent volunteers to go on field trips. We've invited them into the classrooms in our department, to give us help or to bring in some artifacts from their travels, that sort of thing. We have involved interaction. We're now working with the parent committee, the community council on the possibility of a mural. I found this to be extremely positive....

> ...I've gone to a couple of Parent Council meetings. I really see that as a positive thing. We have incredible resources in our community, people...and the more we can get them involved in the school, and the more we can make them aware of what is happening here, the better...The people who are on the Parents' Council – I've met them in a variety of ways, socially as well. I feel very comfortable with them. I don't necessarily agree with the philosophy of each and every one, but it's good to have dialogue and for them to get to know us *as people*, and professionals.

Parents also can be more involved when they feel appreciated. One teacher explained that "...parents are very appreciative, therefore they're more supportive"...

By contrast, parents who did not follow institutional norms of 'appropriate' parental behavior elicited anger, disgust, fear and frustration in teachers. These parents openly questioned teachers' authority, rather than praising or recognizing teachers' efforts, or teachers felt some parents did not treat their children in the 'right' way. All teachers reported feeling negative emotions when parents were viewed as uncaring or irresponsible; not supportive of teachers' efforts; or not respectful of teachers' professional judgment. Negative emotions got in the way of building trusting relationships with parents by making teachers defensive and less willing to take emotional risks:

> ...I've heard horror stories from other schools where there can be (parent) radicals who are out to bash one side of education or one component of education or another...
>
> ...People are getting really angry...with (the Minister of Education)...he is critical of the education system, making the most blatant statements. Teachers are defensive, because they're doing the best they can...There's some pretty good teachers here. And when you get (negative press)...parents pick up on it sometimes...Our department head has been dressed down by a parent who had no time for school and has no time for teachers. You know, (it's) pretty hard to take. I had one abusive phone call in the fall. I told him to talk to my principal and get another counselor for his children... I'm not taking this from a parent. He was rude.

Teachers can simply withdraw emotionally when they interact with parents who don't agree with their perspectives:

> I don't know whether I have any emotional relationships with parents. I may have had a bad day and I had to call a parent and they may say anything bad and I'll say, 'Yeah, well whatever you have to say'. You just know you can't say anything back so you just say, 'Alright, well I just wanted to make you aware of what your child's doing', and then get off the phone.

In summary, the consistency in the conditions that elicited negative and positive emotions in teachers indicate that teachers who did not develop relationships with parents tended to hold standardized, somewhat one dimensional, almost stereotypical views of them, where parents were judged according to norms of 'good' and 'bad' parenting. This brings us directly to the topic of power.

Power

> ...Parents have a lot more power than they realise. A small group of parents recognise that they have a fair amount of influence, and they're using that, and they are very active on the Parent Council. Some of them are not recognising the limitations they ought to recognise, in terms of their own expertise.

Professions such as teaching are a site of power, in terms of the ability or official capacity people have to exercise control or authority over others. Three different aspects of power dynamics between teachers and parents were present in the data. One was normative (Foucault, 1984), involving processes of mutual surveillance and judgment between teachers and parents. Members of the teaching profession are socialized into its discourses and practices of hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment (Foucault, 1984). Such normalizing judgment classifies people according to a range of 'good' or 'bad', behaviors, or standards of performance. A second power dynamic concerned teachers' moral purposes, the deeper motivations behind why they taught, and how they dealt with the threats and challenges which some parents posed to these purposes. The third, involved teachers' senses of professionalism, where teachers believed that they held power and authority over parents by virtue of their expert status and specialized training.

Normalization

As moral agents, people experience their feelings at the core of who they are. Challenges to this inner, moral essence evokes a heightened emotionality (Denzin, 1984, pp. 81 & 82). Our interview responses indicate that teachers classify and judge parents according to a range of what they regard as acceptable forms of involvement or 'normality', that is largely an expression of their own moral purposes. Teachers distinguished between parents who were outstanding, negligent, "typical or "involved". Parents who complied most closely with institutional norms of appropriate parent behavior, who were involved and supportive, who praised and recognized teachers' work, who trusted teachers' judgment and who were responsible, elicited positive emotions like pride, happiness, and satisfaction. Parents who transgressed these norms, however, elicited opposite reactions:

> ...The Parents' Council is...basically three families...(who) have taken over the...executive...It's the parent activists...The government has implemented Parents' Council...but they haven't been given any clear understanding of what authority they have...They're certainly not going to be hiring teachers or deciding pay scales.

Teachers expressed that the paramount purpose of teaching is the commitment and obligation to care for their students. Nias (1999) makes three generalizations concerning the caring purposes of teaching:

- most teachers regard their relationships with their pupils as a personal rather than an impersonal bureaucratic one;
- they derive from the interpersonal nature of this relationship a moral, as distinct from legal, sense of responsibility for and accountability to pupils and often their parents;
- most teachers feel that their moral "answerability" to pupils puts on them an obligation to "care" for them.

Others have focused on the idea of teaching as a caring profession (Noddings, 1992; Acker, 1998). Because they feel responsible for children, teachers believe they must act in their students' best interest. This obligation to care may be directed to children's physical, social, emotional, or moral welfare, to their learning or to all of these (Nias, 1999, p. 227).

Admirable though it seems as a moral purpose of teaching, the expression of caring in teaching is not always an altruistic or virtuous act. Teachers can care only on their terms, which can be inseparable from control (Hargreaves, 1994). Teachers, like nurses, may find themselves in bureaucratic, impersonal work environments which make caring difficult, contacts impersonal and clients unappreciative. In such situations, caring may turn into martyrdom, self-sacrifice and bitterness (Grumet, 1988). Caring can also be expressed from a normative position - the standpoint of the expert, of the middle class, or of the dominant culture.

Dehli (1995) cautions us to be critical of notions of 'caring' and moral agency. She suggests that much school practice takes for granted that heterosexual, two-parent, middle-class nuclear family-forms provide the 'best' environment for children. The work organization of the classroom and the school relies heavily on the supplementary work of middle-class mothers from nuclear, two-parent homes (Smith, 1989, Griffith and Smith, 1986). Those who do not fit this model are often seen as lacking, inadequate or uncaring. Notions of appropriate family-forms, parenting styles, and proper ways to interact with schools vary according to ethnocultural identity (Delpit, 1995; Ogbu, 1993), social class (Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997; Lareau, 1987), and religious identity (Gibson, 1988). Parents whom teachers classify as not merely different, but difficult, as not normal and apparently uncaring, can provoke conflict and negative emotion in teachers to the point of incredulity, exasperation and even disgust.

> ...Some parents do not support their kids as much as they should. You know teenagers go through such terrible traumas...It hurts me sometimes because I'm a parent and I see parents who are not as understanding of their children as they might be, or not as supportive and I get angry...that hurts me deeply. I had a little girl whose parents used what is called 'tough love'. At the time she needed a lot of strong cuddles and understanding and no judgment...the parents' love is taken away and I don't understand that...When I feel disappointment it's because I love their child. I care about the child and I give the assistance, help trying to make them love their child...
>
> Without picking a particular parent, I think that this situation would be negative...when a student is not progressing in school because they are failing, they are chronically late, or they are just a behavioral problem. I find the most frustrating experience when you phone home and you can tell by the tone of the parent that they just don't care. They too have given up. If the parent has given up on their own child, its going to be very difficult for a teacher to get across to a student...

Clearly, teachers experience powerful negative emotions when their notions of caring are different from parents, when they feel obligations 'to make the parents love their child', but cannot grasp that the parents may simply love their child and express their parenting in a different way. When purposes cannot be achieved, anxiety, anger, frustration, guilt and other negative emotions are the consequence (Oatly & Jenkins, 1996; Hargreaves, 1998). Teachers consistently reported feeling ineffective, powerlessness and hopeless when they believed their efforts to work effectively with students were impeded due to lack of support from parents. These teachers in particular reported feeling powerless when parents did not support them in developing a sense of personal responsibility in students:

> When I phone home and say, "So and so has missed now about twenty days." And they don't say anything...So after so many years, now I just say, "I'm just informing you that there have been twenty absences, and there's no substitution for being out of the room...And there's nothing else we can do. The law ties our hands on it. If the parent allows the kid to stay home, there's nothing I can do about it. I get really angry, because I look at the kid and I think, if you worked for me, I'd have to let you go because you're not here enough to do the work...timing, attendance and accountability are really important...I find it so frustrating. You roll with the punches, and after a while you have to give up, because you can't fight city hall.

Helping students was central to teachers' moral purposes. There are, of course, times when parents are truly indifferent, negligent or abusive. But many

parents who seem uncaring or nonsupportive, have values or practices different from teachers. As teachers interact with an ever more diverse population, it is increasingly important that they develop the ability to discern when their cultural assumptions, moral purposes, values and ethics provoke negative feelings towards parents who do not behave in ways they believe are appropriate.

The literature on emotions indicates that people experience happiness when their purposes are being fulfilled or when they experience feelings of achievement (Hargreaves, 1998; Oatley, 1991). Teachers in our study felt fulfilled and empowered when their moral purposes meshed with and were recognized by parents:

> ...When it comes to getting students to do their homework or to affect any kind of strategy with respect to discipline, we're really helpless without that parental support. If the parents are happy with what we're doing and see what we're doing something for the benefit of their child, then they'll help us out. But we need to establish good relationships and see compromises...

Consistency in parents' and teachers' moral purposes invoked positive emotions. It created a sense of continuity, shared values and common goals, some of the very conditions that can lead to relationship. Alternately, when there was a lack of congruency, teachers felt their efforts were being subverted. This created a sense of powerlessness and caused teachers to distance themselves from parents. While many teachers valued collaboration between home and school, our data suggest that they preferred this to occur in a unidirectional manner. By and large, teachers expected parents to conform to the institutional norms of appropriate parent behavior.

Students come to school from a variety of familial and personal situations, some of which may not match teachers' goals and objectives for their students. Stereotypical perceptions can play a role in the value judgments educators make. For example, teachers sometimes identify single-parent families as being linked to problems in school (Lareau, 1987; Crozier, 1997). However, there are other factors, such as poverty, that are also significant influences in student and parent attitudes, behaviour, and emotional disposition (Levin, 1994). The work that schools commonly require of mothers may be particularly difficult to perform under the conditions of sole supporting mothering, especially in circumstances of poverty (Griffith and Smith, 1986). It is, therefore, a concern that each parents' ability to participate in their children's education is too often evaluated by the same standards and ethical norms that are held for middle class mothers in two-parent homes:

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> Single parent families...that type of student. I don't want to lock them in and stereotype them, but I do generally find with students who say the school sucks, it's not a rewarding experience for them around here because they don't put anything into it. They've never learned that school's enough of a priority. Their parents haven't instilled in themselves even that school's enough of a priority...Mentally they bring (these attitudes) here from their social environment. I really find there's not much you can do. Unless they get on a team and they don't want to go home early. Keeps them here a few extra hours.

> I see the child as the adult in some families. I've got a young girl in grade 9 I had last year, who's been shipped off to another school now, but she says 'my family's white trash.' And it is... Her mother goes off to bingo every night of the week, and she has to look after the children. Her mother used to pull her out of school... grade 9... to look after the younger kids, and she's had umpteen different husbands. Yet, the child... she's so perceptive, and so intelligent. I have no idea where she'll end up. But that kind of thing on a daily basis. A young black girl I have, whose brilliant, whose got a single mom who makes $18k a year, and she can't go to university this year. We have every scholarship application I can put in. That kind of thing frustrates me, That's the most discouraging thing.

The processes of classification and normalization in secondary teacher-parent interaction is one that deserves more attention in contexts of difference and diversity, whether due to race, culture, class or family-type. These data also suggest there needs to be an unpacking of teachers' notions of caring as they influence the ways they judge and classify parents. Lastly, can two-way communication, and more sustained interaction between parents and teachers, decrease the stereotypical or one-dimensional images teachers and parents can hold of each other, or will other kinds of intervention and reculturing of schools be necessary?

Surveillance

In professions such as teaching, the power expressed and embedded in hierarchized forms of surveillance is fully integrated into institutional settings though human relations. Although surveillance rests on individuals, it operates in a network of relations from top to bottom, from bottom to top, and laterally. This network holds the whole together (Foucault, 1984, p 192). In our data, it is clear that teachers monitored parents to regulate student behavior:

> I had a run-in with a parent. This parent was crazy to put it mildly...this woman gave her daughter a note that she could leave school at any time. Or if she was late, it was because she wasn't

> feeling well...so the parent will lie for the kid...I don't have the nerve...to confront the parents about lying...but I have said to the parents, "Kate was in school. We were doing a test and Kate was out smoking a cigarette...I could see her. I have no recourse but to give her a zero on the test she skipped". The parent agreed with that. But, it's just that, OK here's a problem. Let's get together and do something about it. Don't just write notes lying about it...It's really frustrating because this child is under sixteen, not coming to class, so is failing. And I have to identify my failure rates...I'll have someone come to me and say, "Well, why do you have a failure rate of 25%? You must be doing something wrong." Where as if the kid was in class, we could do it. She would get the marks.

Parents, too, judge teachers according to norm-based criteria of appropriate behavior. Teachers are under surveillance by parents and their supervisors. When parents report teacher behavior to school administrators, teachers can experience gratification or anguish:

> His mother wrote a note to the principal explaining how happy her son was to be in my geography class. That as a new teacher, the school was very fortunate to have a teacher with youth, exuberance and enthusiasm. That's been etched in my mind since then. And very positive.

Teachers and parents judge each other according to norm-based beliefs. They often rely on surveillance and the authority of principals to hold each other accountable. A key question becomes, "how can the conditions be created so that parents and teachers can move beyond mutual surveillance (Crozier, 1998) and normalizing judgment in their interactions?"

Professionalism

One last theme was present in the data. This third aspect of power, also shaped through teachers' socialization into the culture of teaching, has to do with the authority and power teachers believe they hold over parents due to their professional status. The model of schooling which has been ascendant for approximately the last century is the conception of schooling as a professional-technical enterprise. It assumes:

- That teachers and other school personnel are experts who know more about how to educate children than parents;
- That educators embody a broader and more balanced view of a child's educational needs than do parents;

- That in the parents absence, they delegate responsibility for their children's education to the school and that educators should be empowered to fulfill this responsibility with wide discretion and autonomy, based on professional expertise and judgment; and
- That the school may delegate tasks to the parents, such as assisting in homework and requesting volunteers for the classroom, and that the home's sphere of influence is to carry out the goals and priorities set by school officials (Cibulka, 1994, p. 3).

The notion of teacher professionalism is not a static or absolute term. It changes as external forces to the profession redefine and shape teachers' job expectations. It also changes as teachers themselves struggle to redefine their purposes and roles as teachers. Sleegers (1998) and vanVeen et al. (1999) have described teachers' extended, limited, progressive, traditional and indifferent professional orientations. Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) also discuss classical, flexible, practical, complex and postmodern forms of professionalism. These categorizations of teacher professionalism are researcher, rather than teacher defined, yet they begin to identify the range in typologies of 'professionalism'. The work of Epstein, (1995) and Comer, (1996) also indicates that notions of teacher professionalism can be reformulated to include a valuing of parent input and diversity. Our data support the notion that teachers' beliefs in "teacher-as-expert" can create a perceived hierarchy of knowledge, value, and status that affects teachers' willingness to collaborate with parents as equals (Saunders, M. & Epstein, J., 1998, p. 487). They also indicate that some teachers are grappling with how to define their professionalism differently in relation to parents.

Teachers reported feeling positive emotions when parents spoke with a tone of concern or respect and agreed with their professional judgment, as when teachers and parents worked together or agreed that the child 'needs help'. When these conditions were present, teachers felt respected for their professionalism and believed they achieved their moral purposes of helping students. Some teachers felt that questioning of, or disagreement with their professional judgment undermined their authority. They clearly experienced anger and indignation when parents questioned their recommendations concerning discipline, academic achievement or the curriculum:

> Parents think they're experts in education and it amazes me...I had a student come back after I had marked their paper. There was a very nasty note, written by the parent, that it was the most outrageous marking they had ever seen, and what was my criteria, etc., etc.....I

> sent a message home though his kid. I said, "You can come and see me, no problem, but I'm much too busy to write a written report". I told him he wasn't qualified to comment on what I was doing...And I said, "What would you think if I presumed to walk into your office, and tell you how to do your job...and yet, you think you can comment on my job. You're not qualified. Good, you're concerned about your kid, but don't think you're going to intimidate me into giving him more marks, because, you're not"...They have such naive expectations

For other teachers, parent disagreement or criticism was a source of genuine inner struggle, as they strove to construct their professionalism differently in relation to parents:

> I think sometimes when a parent calls and they're sort of being pointed in their criticism over the phone, you get very defensive and you feel like, hey wait a minute, You know. I've done this, this, this and this. And you know, don't tell me how to do my job. And you know, there's those kinds of feelings that come out. You feel annoyed that there is this person who keeps phoning and saying that you're not doing your job. You wish he'd go away. But you also feel a sense of responsibility, because when you step back from him and say, "well, maybe he's not handling this the best way he could". However, he does have a point in that we are supposed to do all that we can to turn a student round. To get this student to the point where he can sit through classes. And are there other things we could be doing? Maybe we haven't investigated all the resources or options. So, there is a sense that I have to do more. And then you realize you have done everything you can. There's that feeling of, Uh Oh, a little bit of panic, because there is nothing left. We've done everything we can. I've run out of options. What can I say to the person now?

While this teacher acknowledged that he sometimes felt defensive when parents challenged him, he also expressed compassion. He stepped back and acknowledged that although the parent might not have communicated very effectively, he might have a valid point. There was frustration, but there was also empathy. His notion of professionalism included trying to understand the parent's perspective. Implicit in his notion of professionalism was a strong sense of caring. He was concerned with doing the best for the child, by not giving up.

These data make evident that communication barriers can be created between parents and teachers when teachers hold a self-concept of 'teacher-as-expert'. Likewise, more flexible or open notions of teacher professionalism can facilitate communication and mutual understanding. The emotions teachers experienced in their interactions with parents were also affected by their sense of professionalism. Teachers' moral purposes were sometimes inseparable from their

notions of professionalism. These elements point to the need for teacher education, professional development and school leadership to foster more extended and flexible notions of professionalism before teacher-parent relationships, in secondary schools can develop.

Summary

The primary purpose of this paper was to explore the ways in which the culture and organization of teaching influence the experiences and emotions secondary teachers report in their interactions with parents. To achieve this goal, teacher-parent interactions were analyzed as emotional practices, inseparable from teachers' moral purposes, influences of culture, relationship, status and power. Four themes emerged in the data and were examined: (1) the prevalence of interaction rather than relationship between secondary teachers and parents; (2) teachers' sense of moral purpose and notions of caring as they influence how teachers interact with parents, and interpret these interactions; (3) mutual 'surveillance' between parents and teachers; and (4) notions of teacher professionalism as they shape teacher-parent interactions.

These data show that the intellectual and emotional dimensions of secondary teacher-parent interactions were intricately interwoven. The emotions these teachers experienced in their interactions with parents were a mélange of personal and cultural beliefs, largely shaped by the professional norm-based discourses and values they appropriate within the culture of teaching. Most teachers seemed to be more comfortable with parents who filled a related set of expectations and who shared their value systems (Lareau, 1989). They felt demoralized, angry and discouraged with parents who did not fulfill this set of expectations and values.

This paper drew a key distinction between 'Interaction' and 'Relationship'. Many secondary schools lacked the conditions that facilitated teachers and parents developing relationships. This made emotional understanding virtually impossible, as sustained contact, depth of relationship and trust are critical to such a quest. Rather, teacher-parent interactions tended to be more formal, episodic, mechanistic, school-based, and rule-bound (Bernhard & Freire, 1999; Walker & MacLure, 1999). They came together during parent nights, conferences, fund-raising events or during calls home concerning student achievement or behavior. Comments teachers made suggested they often seemed to hold one-dimensional depictions of parents. They had a tendency to 'other' parents - judge and classify them according to a range of normality. Many teachers applied professionally-centred norms to parents regardless

of socioeconomic and marital status. In this regard, judging and classifying of parents was closely tied to teachers' moral purposes and notions of caring.

Many teachers believe that to be an uncaring educator is a contradiction in terms (Nias, 1999; Best, 1995). Yet, the impossibility of teaching and caring for every individual in a large group leads many teachers to retain professional and personal distance from students and their parents so as not to become overly enmeshed in their lives. The physical and emotional costs for teachers who become fully immersed in the emotional lives of students and their parents can be immense. How to care, balanced by distance, without othering or objectifying parents is a tangible tension that many teachers experience. As teachers serve an increasingly diverse population, it becomes vital that their formal education, their continued professional development and their school leaders provide the necessary resources and support so that they can critically examine when and how their notions of caring and their moral purposes might damage their interactions with parents and create emotional conflict within themselves.

Our data suggest there are deeply rooted hegemonic, ubiquitous elements at play that influence secondary teachers' beliefs concerning how teachers should interact with parents, teachers' notions of caring, professionalism and responsible parenting. Relationships between teachers and parents that foster emotional understanding are clearly constrained by structural elements characteristic of modern secondary school bureaucracy and professional norms of emotional distance and formality. The data also indicate that closing the emotional distance between secondary teachers and parents is an area of research and policy that needs much more attention. We have identified a few questions from our findings that seem like a good starting point:

- How do we make explicit and visible the more 'invisible' elements of teacher enculturation?
- Are there conditions unique to secondary school culture and to secondary teachers' notions of professionalism that can facilitate or mitigate parent-teacher interaction or parent involvement in schools?
- How do adolescents' needs differ from elementary aged children in terms of parental involvement in their learning and in school participation?
- What kinds of parent-teacher interactions or relationships can best facilitate student social, academic and emotional development?
- What forms of interaction or relationship do parents of secondary students want with teachers?

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- What research methods will provide more detailed ethnographic examinations of the emotional climate and the cultural norms within secondary schools as they influence parent-teacher interactions?

Conclusion

The concept of emotional understanding should not be confused with emotional dependence or emotional attachment. Emotional understanding is a professional position of self-awareness, receptivity, empathy, and genuine desire to address parents' views, and problems from their perspective. This is a demanding challenge - even when there happens to be cultural and socio-economic compatibility between teachers and parents. Emotional understanding derives from communication that requires commitment, skill and insight about the fundamental differences between 'institutional talk' and open conversation that involves disclosure and risk. This form of communication is not about the absence of conflict or tension. Rather, it is about the capacity to address differences openly and honestly for the sake of adolescents' success and well-being.

It would be irresponsible to put teachers in the position of taking unnecessary emotional risks in their relationships with parents, when the goals and objectives are unclear, when parents are not comfortable or inclined toward emotional disclosure, and when teachers have been given little or no training in relevant communication and relationship skills under a variety of social conditions and cultural contexts. It hardly seems humanly possible for teachers to nurture emotional rapport with the parents of all their students. There need to be reasonable limits and expectations. Teachers need to be fully aware of the pitfalls, as well as the possibilities. Professional development is a good place to start. Yet aspects of secondary school culture and infrastructures will also need changing. Addressing the complexities inherent in building parent-teacher relationship in secondary schools is a challenge that will require committed and creative collaboration between university, community and school members.

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